

# Confession of a Believer at Death

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is chapter 50. We're going to look particularly at the verses from 24 through to the end of the chapter. A chapter which ends with this solemn note that Joseph died being 110 years old.

They embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. It's a dramatic end, isn't it, to the book of Genesis. It's not the kind of ending that we would probably have ended the book of Genesis with. We would want to have had something of a more positive note. And indeed you might read these words and think, well, that's really a very dark statement with which to end any book, isn't it? They embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. After all, this is the end of a very brilliant life. This is the death of a man who had saved not only his own family in times of famine, but had saved Egypt.

It was his counsel and his wisdom and his provision as he ruled over the land of Egypt next to Pharaoh that actually ensured that Egypt in the times of famine had plentiful provision.

[ 1 : 19 ] It's the end of a life that was so filled with godliness, with obedience to God, with faithfulness to God. A life that really shines in the scripture as one of the great lives of God's people.

And now that light's gone out. He's dead. He's put in a coffin in Egypt.

What now? What's going to happen in the future? Have the lights gone out in Egypt completely?

What's the future for Joseph's family?

What's going to happen to them? Not only in the immediate future, but in the long-term future. What is that future for them?

And it's as you look at that, and as you look at this confession that Joseph made, because it is the confession of a believer preparing to die.

[ 2 : 27 ] You could take that as the theme or the title of our study this evening. The confession of a believer preparing to die. Because you cannot take the last verse on its own, of course.

Yes, it looks very gloomy, and it looks a very solemn and dark way with which to end the book. But then you go back to verse 24, and you read what Joseph actually said.

And you read this great statement, and you realize that the end of Genesis is actually filled with hope, not with despair. It's actually packed full of positive light, not darkness.

Because this coffin in Egypt represents something. It represents the hope of Joseph. It represents his hope that God's promises would be fulfilled for himself and for God's people.

And that's why he gave a command that they would carry his bones with them when they left the land of Egypt. That was going to be hundreds of years from the moment that he spoke to his brothers just before he died.

[ 3 : 37 ] It would be a long, long time before Joseph's bones would be carried from Egypt to Canaan. But it's not really about length of time, is it?

It's about the truth of God's promises. It's about God actually fulfilling his promises that he makes to his people. It's about us being sure that God is always true to himself.

That God's covenant with his people is one that is secure. And that not even death, and not even a period of a hundred years looking at a coffin in Egypt is going to interfere with the fulfillment of these promises.

So let's look at Joseph's confession. Let's look at this in the light of the way that Genesis here ends. First of all, Joseph's acceptance of death. We're going to look at that very briefly, though it's an important point in itself. Because we want to look more fully at Joseph's instructions regarding his burial.

[ 4 : 50 ] Because that's where you come to see his faith, and to see his hope, and to see his certainty about God's promises. Joseph's instructions for his burial.

But firstly, Joseph's acceptance of death. Look at what he's saying. Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die. I am about to die.

Sadly, too often, we leave thinking about death until we are about to die. And the Bible never encourages that.

The way we are as a people, I and you together, we know inwardly that we try to think of death only too briefly, not to ignore it altogether, but rather to just put it to a file at the back of our minds, which we're going to open one day, and really deal with it seriously, when the time comes that we are about to die.

But the Bible never encourages that. Although Joseph here is saying, I am about to die, and this is what I command you to do with my bones. Everywhere the Bible encourages us to prepare for death.

[ 6 : 09 ] Because after all, it's one of the few things that we are certain about in our lives. When we come into this world, we don't know how our life's going to develop. We can't be certain about what career we're going to actually end up with.

We can't be certain about whether we're going to be married or single. We can't be certain about many of the things that our life will actually contain. They just become apparent to us as life goes on.

But we can be certain about this one thing right through from the time that we're able to think for ourselves, we are going to die. And it does not make sense that we don't actually think about it and prepare for it while we have the faculties and the ability to do so.

I remember visiting a woman at one time in my first congregation in East Kilbride. A woman of God, a woman who was in hospital and in severe pain.

And she said, you know, one thing that I've been thinking about since I came into hospital and I just can't but thank God for this. That I did not leave this thinking about death and about my need of God to this moment because she said, I'm just not in a position to do it.

[ 7 : 31 ] I'm in so much pain that I cannot think clearly about such big issues as death and eternity and my relationship with God. So please don't do it.

And I'm saying that to the youngest person here this evening as I'm surely saying it to myself. As ministers, we can just as easily as anybody else become so used to the facts of death, to the subject of death, because we are so frequently in sight of coffins and funeral services and laying people's remains to rest.

Young people die also. We're all too aware of that. It's not just once you get past the middle years of life that you're liable to die.

Young people also die. And as we think of that, think of what Joseph is saying here and what it teaches us. Don't put it to the back of your mind.

Think about what it means to die. Think about its finality. Think about the fact that it's going to cut you off from everything you have in this world that is of this world.

[ 8 : 54 ] from precious family, from whatever career we've had. Everything's going to go with death. But more than that, it's going to bring us into the presence of God.

The God who will judge us. A lot of people would think that I was being very morbid tonight thinking and preaching on this particular topic.

Well, I would be morbid and could very justifiably be accused of being morbid if I did this every week, which I don't intend to do.

But it's not morbidity to think seriously about how our life is going to end. It's not being morbid to think about the greatness of eternity.

Thomas Chalmers, in saying, I'm sure you've heard it many times, a man who was so taken up with what he called dimensions. He was a great mathematician as well as a theologian.

[ 10 : 01 ] And when he reflected after his conversion, having been a minister for a number of years and yet not converted, he didn't know God for himself. He had never really reckoned with the big issues of life until God laid an illness upon him.

And then God actually showed him the reality of death and eternity. And he wrote, this he said, is what was wrong with me. I had, he said, neglected the relationship between dimensions.

I had, he said, quite forgotten the greatness of eternity and the littleness of time.

Don't forget these dimensions. We are in this world here tonight preparing for eternity. It would be wrong of me not to mention it in the preaching of the gospel.

You could rightly accuse me if I was to conclude this is far too morbid a subject. You could rightly accuse me at the end of your life. Why didn't you tell me about the greatness of eternity?

[ 11 : 21 ] About the reality of death? About the need to prepare? About what God had done in the face of death? Death. That's why you find Jesus coming to the grave of Lazarus stirred up within himself.

Why is he stirred up within himself? Why did he groan within himself? Why did he weep? It's not just because he had sympathy with these two sisters who had lost their brother.

He did have that. It was indeed the weeping of sympathy. But it goes much deeper than that. This groaning within himself as the Bible puts it is Jesus actually looking at death and saying what an awful thing this is that's come into my creation when the human beings that I created for life are confined to a sepulcher.

that's you see one of the ways in which the Bible shows and highlights the greatness of death of eternity.

So Joseph's acceptance of death and Joseph's preparing for it in that acceptance really speaks to us tonight. Have you done that?

[ 12 : 39 ] Have you actually come to place your trust in Jesus so that whatever things happen between now and death whenever death comes you don't need to worry about it.

It's not going to claim you because you're in Christ. You have his salvation and nothing not even death as Paul said in Romans 8 can separate you from God's love in Christ Jesus.

Joseph's acceptance of death then. But secondly Joseph's instructions for his burial. Now you notice what he's saying. I am about to die and what's the next word? But.

How often you find that in the Bible when something is said and then it's followed by but this is also the case. In other words Joseph is saying yes knowing that they're going to have this coffin to look at for these hundreds of years while they're in Egypt waiting for something dramatic to happen he knows that that's going to be the case and so he's saying to them now I am about to die but God will visit you.

In other words the end of Genesis is not really at all giving the primary emphasis to death it's not leaving the last word with death it's actually saying yes I'm about to die but God but this God who's greater than death is going to visit you and bring you up out of this land.

[ 14 : 21 ] And that's a great word the word visit. God will visit you. We all know what a visit is like.

A visit is something that you and I do or something that you experience somebody doing to you or for you. Somebody comes to visit you in your home they spend time with you and then they go back to their own homes or perhaps you visit somebody you spend time with them you discuss various things and as it happened to be in the past in our communities visiting was such a common almost spontaneous thing.

people would just go and visit their neighbors spend a bit of time there usually on a daily basis and then go back home. But when you read in the Bible about God coming to visit his people God does not visit his people just for a little visit not sort of just for a wee kelly and then move on.

It's not something you associate with having a cup of tea and a scone and a note cake and then going somewhere else and moving on. God comes to visit his people so that he brings them himself and he brings them salvation.

You look in the Bible at all the places where visit is used of God in this way and you'll find that that's the emphasis in it where God has come to bring salvation to his people to bring them redemption to bring them out of their condition of bondage and sin of which Egypt is a representation.

[ 15 : 53 ] Remember how in Luke chapter 1 in fact in verse 68 there where you find Luke's account of the birth of Jesus remarkably there it's exactly these terms that are used when you find in chapter 1 and verse 68 there of Luke's gospel when you find a reference to the visitation of God where you find God actually coming and visiting his people.

You find John's father Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit saying blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David as he spoke by the mouth of his prophets from of old and so it goes on down through his song God has visited his people.

Now God can come to visit in judgment as well in the scriptures but this is in Joseph's passage in the passage here about Joseph it's all about life it's all about deliverance it's about redemption I am

about to die but God will visit you isn't that something precious that you and I can take into your own life and my life when you place your trust in the Lord you can say these words of Joseph I am about to die but God's visit has overcome that with life and when God came in fulfillment of Joseph's word and Joseph's hope in the next book of the Bible chapter 3 and verse 8 it doesn't use the word visit but this is how God himself spoke I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and I've heard their cry because of their taskmasters I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them out of the land the hand of the

Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land a land flowing with milk and honey I have come down what does God's visitation involve it involves him coming down it involves him in power and in grace coming into our circumstances into our condition into our lives to take hold of our lives that's how Paul after Jesus had actually met with him on the way to Damascus when he came to write his Philippian letters his letter to Philippians this is how he put it he who has apprehended me how do you apprehend somebody you reach out and take hold of them or in God's case you come down and you just take hold of their lives of their persons that's what Joseph is saying I am about to die but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land there are many people in the world that want to believe in God that do believe in

[19:14] God there are many people in the world that would want to have God in their lives but for too many and indeed it was so for Israel too it was just when it was convenient when there was some crisis or other that God could be called for and when the crisis was over God disappeared the book of Numbers the book of Judges all these books are an account of God's relationship with his people Israel and the book of Judges especially is a spiral downwards of neglecting God and what that results in because there were the people of Israel with crisis after crisis what did they do in their crisis they cried out after the Lord and the

Lord in his great mercy and patience and forgiveness he actually heard them and then when that was over they went back to the Baals and back to the gods that they worshipped the gods of the Canaanites and then it happened again except it was worse the next time and the next time and the next time you see God is not there at our beck and call yes he hears our prayers yes of course he is a God for our every crisis yes he is there committed to his covenant and to his promises and to his truth for every single one of us whatever conditions we have in life whatever circumstances you are in tonight this God is for you this God is relevant to you this God who makes these promises will not actually be short of fulfilling them but please don't deal with him as a visitor on a short term basis he doesn't do

B&B; it's full companionship or nothing I will surely visit you God will surely visit you as Joseph said have you had this visitor have you called this visitor into your life are you content tonight with just God coming and going in and out of your life when you call upon him when there are things in your life that you feel you need God for but then at other times you don't feel the need so greatly so you don't have such a regular business with him God in the gospel wants to live permanently with you wants to take up permanent residence in your heart is God to

God to God through every single stage of life that's God the visitor permanently God I remember as a young lad one of our neighbors used to visit my mother every day and this woman was a very good woman very well meaning woman she didn't have anything like as much to do in her life as my mother did with a family of young children and helping my father work the land and all of that stuff so the visitations every day yes she valued them she never complained about them but I could see that there were times when they were not convenient when she wanted to get on with the washing or preparing a supper or whatever and sometimes it was a bit obvious when it was a relief when the visitation came after a couple of hours to an end or something like that now sadly some people are if

God is in our lives meaningfully then you don't want it to end you want it to go on more and more on into eternity as that great hymn puts it abide with me abide with me stay with me that's what you say to God isn't it in all my times crisis or otherwise please be the occupant of my life of my heart don't let me be someone who just thinks that I can call upon you when it's convenient and then forget about you for a next however many years or months or weeks or days it might be so there tonight God's visiting of his people that's the first part of Joseph's instruction second is God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob now bringing them up out of the land involves three stages because you need to read on into the book of

[ 24 : 36 ] Genesis and further on into the Old Testament to see how God actually fulfilled this promise that he gave here through Joseph I am about to die but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land and bring you up to this land that he swore to Abraham Isaac and Jacob three stages bringing them out looking after them in the interim and then bringing them in that's the great thing about redemption that's what it consists of God bringing us out of our bondage as sinners God looking after us after he's brought us out in a way that you can compare with his leading of his people and his care for his people through the wilderness years as they went from place to place and faced various difficulties and enemies and challenges but God was with them and God didn't forsake them and God assured them of the validity and of the certainty of his promises time after time and then

God brought them into the land that flowed with milk and honey the land of Canaan that's what his promise was I will bring you out I will look you after I will bring you in and that tonight is the God who presents himself to us in the gospel in terms of Romans chapter 6 isn't that what he really says in that great chapter that demonstrates the way in which God takes us and breaks this hold that sin has of us as the dominant forces in our lives and replaces it with that holy power and energy of the Holy Spirit how does he put it there in Romans 6 verse 14 sin shall no longer have dominion over you for you are under grace and not under the law you have a new master God has delivered you from sin from its clutches from its death hold and as he's brought you out from that bondage what is he now doing every

Christian here knows what it's like he is looking after you he's sanctifying you he's protecting you he's leading you he's guiding you he's teaching you he's preparing you he's equipping you because there is a land that is prepared waiting for your entrance what a great thing it is to be a Christian who could possibly say that it's a bad thing to be a Christian to know Christ to follow Christ to love the Lord our God with all our heart because when we are in Christ and when he has come to take hold of our lives to apprehend us that's essentially what's happening he's brought us out he's looking after us on the journey and he will take us in when you come to die it will be exactly as it corresponds to

Joseph's life and Joseph's promise being fulfilled and his commandment being fulfilled they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt and when you go to Joshua 24 you'll find a verse there that says that Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem in the land of Canaan 400 years after he was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt he's in the land of Canaan at least his bones are buried in the land of Canaan God keeps his promise God God can God God brings us out and keeps us and cares for us defends guides sanctifies and then brings us in I wonder how many times the people of Israel looked at that coffin in

Egypt down through the years and especially during the bad times when they were persecuted by the Egyptians I wonder how many times they looked at that coffin and took encouragement some undoubtedly would maybe many didn't but it was there for them and it was there deliberately and so are the promises of God of which that is a representation as you read your Bible tonight look at the promises of God for his people look at what they say look at what they contain look at where they will take you to that glorious land of heaven what's the alternative well it's death isn't it you might say it just ends with the coffin in Egypt there's no hope no light nothing positive just death he will bring you into this land you know when

[ 30 : 04 ] God if you think of Joseph's brothers carrying his coffin all of these miles and all of these forty years that they spent walking through wandering through the wilderness finally Joseph's coffin comes into the land of Canaan and they bury his bones in Shechem God was right God did bring him in in his coffin and God brought them in as a people I remember too as a young lad when in the days before there were any streetlights certainly not in our part of the world but it meant when you were walking home that you couldn't really see the ditch if you are walking home from my first cousins maybe something like four or five hundred yards or meters down the road and very often when I was very young and down there after it got dark one of the older cousins would actually accompany you all the way up the road until the light of our own house was nearer to the road and you could see a bit of it and then they would very often say well there you are you'll manage yourself now won't you well just imagine if God did that after taking us out from the clutches of death and sin and then seeing us all the way through the wilderness and then coming to face death itself and the step into eternity imagine what it would be like if God said well you'll manage the rest of the journey yourself then won't you he'll he'll take you in he'll accompany you in when your trust is

in him and that's what's great about God's promises they're absolutely secure they're made certain by Jesus

Christ and what has happened in him in his death and resurrection resurrection and that's why Joseph said you shall carry my bones up from here God will visit you he will bring you out of this land and he will bring you into this other land that he swore to give to you and then he made them swear saying you will carry up my bones from here that's faith that's hope that's trusting in the promise of God where else friends can we find security the world out there is going to tell you you'll find it in this or that or other philosophy or that way of thinking or in something to do with this world itself and this Bible is saying to you and God is saying to you no you will not find security you'll not find safety you'll not find comfort you'll not find refuge anywhere but in me but in me you will find it abundantly and Joseph's final statement makes that clear carry up my bones stick them with you because I believe

God's promises I know that they're certain so here's a reminder to us tonight a lot of solemn things but don't deal with the solemn things in themselves or detached from the wonderful brightness the wonderful light that you find in Joseph's confession the positive note that he sends out of hope and of faith let that be your life let that be your vision let that be your confession preparing to die because it speaks God's promises do God's promises speak of two things first of all a better day ahead this life has its own share and fill of worries and anxieties and pains and sorrows and we can dwell on them too much and we can dwell on them too little but they're there they're a reality and that's why you find so often in the

Bible God is saying to us that that's just a short time that's just a little slice of your life the rest of it will be an eternity either saved or lost and so here is a passage here is Joseph's confession saying to us there is a better day so don't grow weary of following Christ don't be afraid of putting your trust in God maybe you're afraid tonight of this visitor coming into your life maybe you're afraid of the implications the consequences the results maybe you're afraid of will you be able to cope with being a Christian with all that that means as people see you living a Christian life what do we say to these things we say put them all over unto God you're not looking after your own life

God is when your trust is in him when you actually embrace his promises well that's where your certainty lies and that's why you can trust what he says don't be afraid of trusting don't be put off by whatever other people say don't be put off by sometimes what you see in the church itself the church is not perfect this congregation is not perfect no congregation is perfect least of all this minister we can all see things in the lives of others that put us off that make us hesitate to put our trust in God and to embrace his promises and to live by faith and hope in Christ look to God's word itself listen to what he's saying look at his dependability his constancy the fact that he never gives up and fails those who trust in him and you have everything you need there to put your trust in him and not be afraid of doing so it speaks of a better day and it speaks too of this it's really a warning for them not to fall in love with

[ 36 : 34 ] Egypt as they look at that coffin for all of these hundreds of years they should be able to say we must not regard Egypt as our home this is not permanently where we as a people belong to we are here for a few hundred years but our place is in Canaan our home is in Canaan the inheritance God has prepared for us is in Canaan that's why Joseph is saying I'm about to die but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land as Paul says to the Roman Christians don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind don't fall in love with this present world this present world and its values and its teachings and its attractions and all that it has to bamboozle us don't regard it as your home don't trust your life to it don't act in regard to it as if this is your eternity friends

Jesus tonight is the way the truth and the life and every time you see a gravestone just like these people saw Joseph's coffin particularly when you see the gravestones associated with the remains of the saints of God whether there's a text on them or not it does speak to us and say the promises of God that's what I must rest in that's where my security is Jesus must be my all in all may bless this word let's pray Lord we thank you for that life that you have brought to us in the person of Jesus Christ and we thank you for that great victory over death which through his death and resurrection he has accomplished and which he passes on to all who trust in him

Lord we pray that as we come to confront and be confronted with your word and its emphasis on death and of life and on that great contrast between them between lostness and being saved between fulfilling these promises of God in our own experience and turning our back on them we

pray that you would help us to place our trust and confidence in you that you will be our God even unto death so hear us now we pray for Jesus sake amen let's conclude our service tonight singing in psalm 16 and that's on page 216 psalm 16 verses 8 to 11 let's sing these four stanzas page 216 to

God's praise on Father whom I shall not do it be.

Because of this my heart is glad, and joy shall be expressed.

[ 41 : 20 ] Invite my glory and my flesh, and confidence shall rest.

Because my soul it gave to dwell, shall not be led by thee, nor will thou give thy holy one corruption to see.

Thou wilt be sure the path of life, of joys there is full store, before thy face, at thy right hand, are pleasures evermore.

If you would allow me to get to the main door tonight, please, after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and evermore.

Amen.